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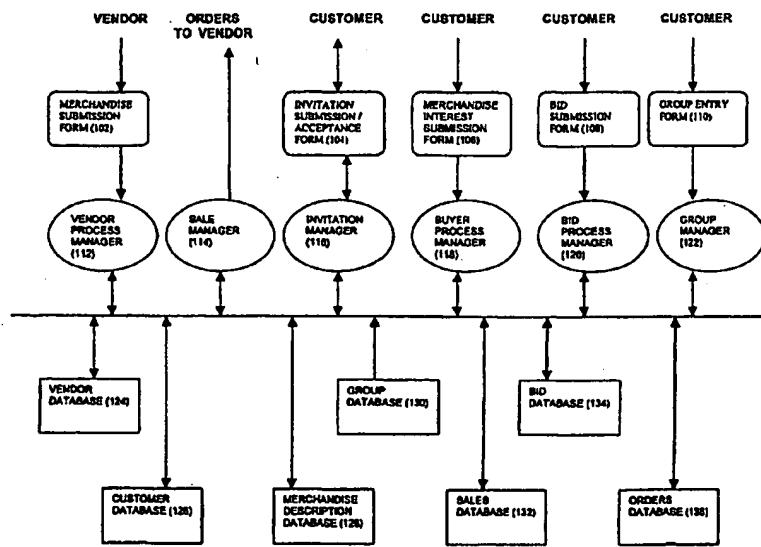
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(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR BUYER-INITIATED AGGREGATING OF BUYERS TO OBTAIN DESIRED PRODUCTS AT DISCOUNTED PRICES



(57) Abstract

A buyer-initiated process including posting the description of a product item of interest to a buyer and aggregating buyers who are interested in the same product or service. Vendors can then offer the desired product or service by posting the best price they can offer to the group of buyers. The preferred process creates direct competition between vendors who wish to win the business of the aggregated buyer group. Buyers benefit from obtaining the desired product at the best price available from all participating vendors.

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Description

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR BUYER-INITIATED AGGREGATING OF BUYERS TO OBTAIN DESIRED PRODUCTS AT DISCOUNTED PRICES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates generally to electronic commerce and more particularly to the formation of online communities to initiate the purchasing of products that are generally not available in the marketplace at reasonable prices.

Description of the Related Art

There are well-known and significant advantages available to buyers who increase their purchasing power. Vendors offer bigger discounts and better customer service to high volume customers, and are more willing to make changes to their product offerings to suit high volume buyer demands. In the available art, this greater purchasing power rests with big corporations. Individuals and smaller corporations presently do not have access to a flexible, multi-product mechanism providing the advantages afforded by high volume purchasing power.

There are currently two possible ways for buyers to improve their negotiating position with vendors. One approach is to join a purchasing club such as Sam's Club or Costco. However, a buyer taking this approach to purchasing suffers significant disadvantages. First, the club does all the negotiation with the vendors – the buyer is not involved in the negotiating process. Also, the purchasing club decides what products may be of interest to their members and then negotiates with vendors for those products. In addition, buyers must pick only from a pre-selected list of products and have no convenient mechanism for changing or adding to the products available. Also, buyers have no direct influence over the prices they pay, and have no incentive to cooperate with other buyers to affect prices. Finally, available buying clubs provide no mechanism to create direct competition between vendors for buyer activity.

5 Internet-based companies such as Priceline.com, whose sales mechanism is
described in U.S. Patent No. 5,794,207, incorporated herein by reference.
10 Specifically, Priceline.com provides a means for an interested user to state the
price he or she would be willing to pay for a particular product. There is no
15 aggregation of purchasing power. Further, using Priceline.com, an interested
user can pick only a few well-known and commonly available products and
services.

15 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

A preferred embodiment of the present invention comprises an automated
10 system and method of buying, comprising: a) a Merchandise Interest Submission
Form to obtain product information about a desired product from a first buyer; b)
a Merchandise Submission Form to obtain sale information for the product from
a first vendor; c) a Buyer Process Manager to store product information in a
25 Merchandise Description Database; d) a Vendor Process Manager to store sale
15 information in a Sale Database; and e) a Sale manager to match product
information and sale information and generate orders for the product. Preferably,
the system obtains offers from more than one vendor and then offers the buyers
30 the best price. Also preferably, the system employs a Group Manager to
aggregate buyers seeking the same product. Once a vendor is identified for a
20 given product, the buyers in the corresponding group will automatically submit
35 bids for the product. The system may also comprise a Bid Process Manager and
Bid Submission Forms to allow additional buyers to place bids. The buyers may
place and withdraw bids after the Start Time of the sale. After the Hold Time,
40 only new bids and increased bids are allowed. Ideally, both the buyers and the
25 vendor(s) communicate with the system via a wide area network such as the
Internet. However, other means of submitting and receiving information from
the system are possible including automated telephone systems or even direct
45 input and output, such as keyboard, monitor and printer.

In another embodiment, the system comprises a) Buyer Process means for
30 obtaining product information from a buyer about a product; b) Vendor Process
means for obtaining sale information for the product from a vendor; and c) a

5 Sale means for matching product information and sale information and generate
orders for the product. The invention also is a computer-implemented method
comprising the steps of a) obtaining product information for a desired product
from a buyer; b) obtaining sale information about the product from a vendor; c)
10 5 storing and organizing the sale information; d) storing and organizing the product
information; e) matching product information and sale information; and f)
generating orders for the product. The method can also comprise the steps of
15 grouping additional buyers based on interest for the same product or comparing
the sale information from more than one vendor to find the best price or offering
20 10 invitations to potential buyers. The invention also comprises computer-readable
media having instructions for carrying out the above steps.

The present invention is a buyer initiated process where a buyer who desires a specific product that is either atypical, and hence currently unavailable in the marketplace, or is available at a price that he is unwilling to pay, can aggregate buyers who also want the same product. This aggregation of other potential buyers may be done by any number of ways including postal mail, advertisements, email, or using the Internet. This aggregation of buyers will result in an entity with a greater purchasing power than was possible by any of its members acting alone.

20 The group that has been formed to express an interest in buying a particular product attracts vendors who desire to offer the particular product to the group, thereby inducing price competition among the vendors who offer the product, to the group's benefit. These vendors may not have otherwise offered the product at those prices for various reasons. For example, they may not 25 have been aware that such a product was desired or that there was sufficient demand for the product. With the formation of the group, however, the marketing cost to find buyers for the product has been reduced and hence some of those savings can now be passed on to the buying group.

It is therefore a first advantage of the present invention to provide an intermediary-free opportunity for buyers to negotiate with vendors while aggregating purchasing power

5 It is a second advantage of the present invention is that any consumer
can describe the product he would like, aggregate others with a similar interest,
and engage in negotiating with potential vendors.

10 It is another advantage of the method and system of the present invention
15 5 is that the purchasing group is temporarily formed to get the best possible price
for a particular product of interest to the group, no matter how obscure or
unusual the product might be.

15 Still another advantage of the method and system of the present invention
is the provision of increased buyer choice and direct effect on product selection,
20 10 direct buyer influence on the price paid for an item, the provision of incentive for
buyers to cooperate in order to influence price, and the provision of a forum for
active competition between vendors for a set of buyers committed to purchasing
an item.

25 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

30 15 The aforementioned advantages of the invention, as well as additional
advantages thereof, will be more fully understood as a result of a detailed
description of a preferred embodiment when taken in conjunction with the
accompanying drawings in which:

35 FIG. 1 schematically illustrates the overall system of the present
invention, including databases, processes, and data input/output forms;

40 FIG. 2 is a flow chart illustrating the Buyer Process Manager of the
present invention;

45 FIG. 3 is a flow chart illustrating the Bid Process Manager of the present
invention;

50 25 FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating the Sale Manager of the present
invention;

45 FIG. 5 is a flow chart illustrating the Invitation Manager of the present
invention;

55 30 FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating the Group Process Manager of the
present invention;

5 FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating the Vendor Process Manager of the
10 present invention.

10 While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative
15 forms, specific embodiments thereof have been shown by way of example in the
20 drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood,
25 however, that the detailed description is not intended to limit the invention to
30 the particular forms disclosed. On the contrary, the intention is to cover all
35 modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of
40 the invention as defined by the appended claims.

45 **10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

50 The system and method of the present invention facilitates
55 communication between one or more buyers and one or more vendors. The
60 process is initiated by a buyer submitting information about a desired product.
65 This information is communicated to vendors and to other potential buyers
70 across a wide area computer network such as the Internet. Other buyers are
75 then allowed, and alternatively invited, to submit bid information to join a group
80 and express interest in the desired product so that the vendors can gauge the
85 demand for the desired product. One or more vendors may then offer the
90 desired product at a given price. The inventive system and method then
95 automatically selects the vendor offering the lowest price. Once a vendor has
100 submitted information about the offered product, it is assigned a "Start Time," a
105 "Hold Time" and a "Close Time" and becomes a sale. After the Start Time, the
110 group information is converted to bids for the product. Further, all buyers may
115 place additional bids for the product. At the Close Time, any outstanding bids
120 are processed and the product is sold at the price offered by the vendor. The
125 Hold Time freezes the minimum bid for the offered product by requiring users
130 who have an open bid at the Hold Time to honor that bid. After the Hold Time
135 users cannot withdraw or decrease their bids, although they may increase bids
140 or add a new bid. Until the Hold Time, the user has complete freedom. Any
145 buyer can decide to increase the number of units bid for, introduce a new bid,
150 decrease the number of units bid for, or withdraw a bid completely.

5 As shown in FIG. 1, one embodiment of the invention comprises a
computer system having a number of software modules including: Forms that
allow the input of information from vendors and buyers; Databases that organize
and store the buyer and vendor information; and Managers that process and
10 5 communicate the information between the Forms and the Databases.

Specifically, the Forms comprise: Merchandise Submission Form 102, which allows vendors to submit information about offered products; Invitation Submission/Acceptance Form 104, which allows buyers to invite others to the system and invited buyers to accept the invitation; Merchandise Interest Submission Form 106, which allows buyers to submit information and thus request a product; Bid Submission Form 108, which allows a buyer to submit a bid for an offered product; and Group Entry Form 110, which allows buyers to express interest in a requested product.

The Managers process and control the flow of information from the Forms and Databases and comprise: Vendor Process Manager 112, which controls the products placed for sale by a vendor; Sale Manager 114, which controls the initiation and closing of sales; Invitation Manager 116, which controls the invitation of other buyers to join the bidding process for a particular product; Vendor Process Manager 118, which controls the products requested by buyers; Bid Process manager 120, which controls the buyers bids for an offered product; and Group Manager 122, which enables other buyers to join in and express interest in a requested product. Specific operations of the Managers are illustrated in FIGs. 2-7 and described below.

The Databases organize and store the product, vendor and bid information and comprise: Vendor Database 124, which stores information about all the participating vendors; Customer Database 126, which stores information about all the buyers registered to participate in online purchasing; Merchandise Description Database 128, which stores information about each product offered for sale; Group Database 130, which stores information about buyer demand for a requested product; Sales Database 132, which stores information about each sale that is known to the system; Bid Database 134, which stores bids

5 registered by buyers for each sale, and Orders Database 136, which stores
orders at the consummation of a Sale.

10 The Buyer Process Manager 118 enables a user, preferably only a
registered user, to post a description of the merchandise the user is interested
5 in, in order to request a product. Once the product is requested, a group can
begin forming, thereby aggregating other potential buyers with a similar interest.
A flow chart illustrating the operation of Buyer Process Manager 118 is provided
15 in FIGs. 2A and 2B.

FIG. 2A illustrates in flow-chart form the process triggered by a buyer
10 submitting information for a requested product via Merchandise Interest
Submission Form 106. At step 201, the system checks to see if the buyer is
20 registered. Also at step 201, the buyer's identity is authenticated. Various
methods of identifying a buyer, including reading his network address, are
25 envisioned as part of the present invention, as will be understood by one having
15 the normal skill in the art to which the present invention pertains. Preferably,
the authentication process is automated. In step 202, the buyer submits
identifying information and, if not yet registered, registers with the system. In
30 step 203, Buyer Process Manager 118 processes information from Merchandise
Interest Submission Form 106 to the system. Specifically, the information is
checked for validity and completeness including determining whether the desired
35 product is fully described so as not to be ambiguous when reviewed by potential
vendors. Buyer Process Manager 118 also determines whether other buyers
have already requested such a product. At step 204, the buyer is notified if
40 there is a problem with the information and prompted for correction. The buyer
45 is also notified if another buyer has already requested the same or similar
product and the buyer is given the option to join the group for that product as
described below. At step 205, the verified merchandise description is passed to
50 Merchandise Description Database 124 and the price for the product set as "no
current price" since no vendor has yet offered the product. Group Database 136
is updated at step 206 by creating a new record for the requested product so
that other buyers express interest.

5 As shown in FIG. 2B, information about the product is communicated to potential buyers at step 207, preferably by posting the information on the Internet or other wide area network. Finally, at step 208, the information is communicated about the requested product to vendors, also preferably via the
10 5 Internet. The information could also be communicated through newspapers, email, telephone or other means.

15 FIGs. 3A and 3B are flow charts illustrating the operation of Bid Process Manager 120, allowing a prospective buyer to register interest in purchasing a requested product that has subsequently been offered for sale (as shown in FIG.
20 10 7) by placing a bid for the product. As shown in FIG. 3A, the prospective buyer is checked at step 301 to determine whether the buyer is registered with the system. This also includes any desired authentication steps to verify the customer's identity. Preferably, this could be accomplished using automated identification and authentication processes known to those skilled in the art.
25 15 New customers are registered by submitting the requisite information in step 302. In step 303, the customer's instruction to place a new bid in the sale or to increase the number of units in an existing bid is processed if the sale is
30 30 between the Start Time and the Close Time. Instructions to decrease a bid or withdraw it altogether are processed in step 304 by checking to see if the Hold
35 20 Time for the sale has occurred. Step 305 returns an error message to the customer if it is after the Hold Time for the sale, informing the customer that the bid cannot be deleted or reduced. If the Hold Time has not occurred, step 306
40 deletes or reduces the customers bid accordingly and updates Bid Database
45 134. New or increased bids processed in step 303 are verified in step 307, including checking to see if the bid refers to the product offered in the sale, and if the quantity requested is currently available. Step 308 returns an error message if the bid is not validated in step 307. Conversely, as shown in FIG.
50 3B, validated bids are added to Bid Database 134 in step 309.

45 FIGs. 4A and 4B flow illustrate the operation of Sale Manager 114, which generally comprises the steps taken to initiate a new sale and the steps taken to close out a sale. Each sale stored in Sale Database 132 is in one of four

5 different states: New, Active, Hold and Closed. Once a vendor has offered a
product in response to a buyer request, a new sale is added to the Sales
Database 132 based on the information obtained through Merchandise
Submission Form 102 to Vendor Process Manager 112 as described below.

10 5 Sale Manager 114 controls the process by which a new sale becomes Active,
Held, or Closed.

15 Specifically, FIG. 4A illustrates that at step 401, Sale Database 132 is
queried for all new sales whose Start Time is at or after the current time. At
step 402, such sales are marked as Active. In step 403, Active sales are
20 10 communicated to prospective buyers, preferably through a wide area network
such as the Internet. This includes getting the corresponding merchandise
description information from Merchandise Description Database 128 and
combining that with the sale information, formatting all of it appropriately,
25 15 putting the final description through an approval process that may be
automated, and then publishing the information on the web. At step 404, Sale
Manager 114 queries Sale Database 132 for all Active sales with a Hold Time at
or after the current time. Step 405 marks the appropriate sales as Held. Step
30 20 406 queries the Sale database for all Held sales with a Close Time that is at or
after the current time and marks them as Closed in step 407 so that no
increases or new bids will be accepted.

35 FIG. 4B shows the steps taken to close out a sale. At step 408, Closed
sales are identified and, at step 409, Bid Database 134 is queried for all
outstanding bids corresponding to the Closed sale. At step 410, the product
40 25 vendor's information is obtained from the Vendor Database 124 and the price
information is taken from Merchandise Description Database 128. A purchase
order is constructed for each buyer whose bid remains outstanding at the end of
the sale. The purchase order reflects the number of units bid for by the
45 30 customer and the unit price given by the vendor. At step 411, the processed
bids are deleted from Bid Database 134 and newly created purchase orders from
step 410 are added to Orders Database 136. Finally, at step 412, the

5 processed sale is deleted from Sale Database 132 and step 413 returns to step
408 until all closed sales are processed.

10 A flow chart for the operation of Invitation Manager 116 in conjunction
with Invitation Submission/Acceptance Form 104 is shown in FIG. 5. Generally,
15 5 customers invite other users to join the system and bid on products. Since the
invention is predicated on the aggregation of buying power, it is in the interests
of the buyers to recruit as many new buyers as possible. Potential users
20 wishing to accept the invitation use Invitation Manager 116 to do so. At step
501 the processes are routed to one of two paths: at steps 502-506 an
25 invitation is sent from a current user to a prospective one, while at steps 507-
509, a prospective user may accept an invitation.

30 At step 502, current users wishing to issue an invitation are first checked
to determine whether they are registered. If not, they are registered and added
25 to Customer Database 126 in step 503. At step 504, invitation validity is
checked. The validity determination may be based upon whatever policies are
30 desired for a particular implementation. For example, in one embodiment a
customer must invite another user to a specific sale only, or no more than 5
users may be invited at any given time, or each customer must provide certain
35 pieces of information about each user invited to join. At step 505 an error
message is returned if the invitation is not validated by step 504. Valid
40 invitations are formatted and then communicated to the desired prospective
users in step 506. Suitable means of communication include email, fax, postal
mail and the like. For example, the buyer who requests a product can send
45 emails inviting others to express an interest, and the email could contain a
25 uniform resource locator link so that the recipient can easily pull up the
50 merchandise description information.

55 Invited users are checked at step 507 to determine whether they are in
Customer Database 126. If the invitee is already a registered customer, then
Invitation Manager 116 simply reminds the user. Alternatively, at step 508 the
30 requisite information is obtained and the invitee is added to Customer Database

5 126 to register the user. Suitable identification of the invitor is added to the
record of the invitee at step 509.

10 FIG. 6 illustrates the steps taken by Group Manager 122 when a buyer
joins a group to indicate demand for a requested product by submitting
15 information via Group Entry Form 110. At step 601, the system checks whether
the buyer is registered. This step also authenticates the buyer to verify the
buyer's identity. This includes various ways of identifying a buyer including
20 reading his network address, etc. At step 602, the buyer submits his
information and registers himself with the system if the buyer is currently not
25 registered with the system. At step 603, Group Manager 122 validates
information from Group Entry Form 110 to determine which group in Group
Database 130 the buyer wishes to join. The buyer also specifies the number of
30 units of the product desired. At step 604, the buyer is notified whether there is
a problem with the information and prompts correction. At step 605, Group
Database 130 is updated to reflect the buyer's interest.

35 The flow charts of FIGs. 7A and 7B illustrate the steps taken by Vendor
Process Manager 114 to obtain information from Merchandise Submission Form
40 102 about products offered by vendors in response to products requested by
buyers. As shown in FIG. 7A, at step 701 vendor registration is checked vendor
identity authenticated. At step 702, a previously unregistered vendor submits
45 the necessary information. At step 703, Vendor Process Manager 114
processes information from Merchandise Submission Form 102 and forwards the
50 processed information. Specifically, the submitted information is checked for
validity and completeness, and at step 204 the vendor is prompted to alert the
system of any errors. The vendor supplies the quantity of the product offered
and the offer price. At step 705, correspondence of the offered product to a
requested product in Group Database 130 is verified and at step 706 the vendor
is prompted if there is no match. If a requested product is matched in step 705,
the price quoted by the vendor is compared to the current price at step 707. If
55 there is no current price, or if the price is equal or superior to the price given by
another vendor, steps 709 through 716 are executed as shown in FIG. 7B. If

5 the offered price is not equal or superior to the current price, the vendor is
10 notified in step 708 and allowed to set a lower price if desired.

10 FIG. 7B illustrates the steps for updating the system once the vendor
15 submits a valid offer price in step 707. At step 709, the current price for the
20 product in the Merchandise Description Database 128 is set to the price offered
25 by the vendor. Next, the system checks to see if a sale record already exists for
30 the product in step 710. If Sale Database 132 includes a record for the product,
35 the operation skips ahead to step 715. If not, a sale is created by steps 711 to
40 714. Specifically, at step 711 a sale record is created in Sale Database 132 and
45 the sale is marked Active to indicate that the actual selling process is underway.
50 In step 712, the Hold Time and the Close Time for the sale are set relative to
55 the current time. Since the Sale becomes Active when the first valid vendor
arrives, the user initiating the process cannot know exactly when to set the Hold
Time and Close Time, both of which are therefore set relative to the Active
Time. At step 713, all bids in Group Database 130 for the particular product are
moved to Bid Database 134. Finally, at step 714, the merchandise description
for the product is published. Alternatively, in step 715, where a sale record
already exists Merchandise Description Database 128 is simply updated with the
new price being offered by the current vendor. Step 716 follows either step
714 or 715 depending on whether a sale record existed, and the group members
of the vendor's offered product are notified accordingly.

40 The present invention therefore provides a novel method and system for
45 buyer-initiated aggregating of buyers to obtain desired products at discounted
50 prices. Although the present invention has been shown and described with
55 respect to preferred embodiments, various changes and modifications lie within
60 the spirit and scope of the claimed invention. Thus, the corresponding
65 structures, materials, acts, and equivalents of all means or step plus function
70 elements in the claims are intended to include any structure, material, or acts for
75 performing the functions in combination with other elements as specifically
80 claimed.

Claims

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5 What is claimed is:

10 1. A computerized system for aggregating purchasing power comprising:

15 5 a) a Merchandise Interest Submission Form to obtain product information about a desired product from a first buyer;

20 10 b) a Merchandise Submission Form to obtain sale information for the product from a first vendor;

25 15 c) a Buyer Process Manager to store product information in a Merchandise Description Database;

30 20 d) a Vendor Process Manager to store sale information in a Sale Database; and

35 25 e) a Sale manager to match product information and sale information and generate orders for the product.

40 25 2. The computerized system of claim 1, further comprising a Group Entry Form to obtain group bid information from a second buyer about the product and a Group Manager to store the group bid information in a Group Database.

45 30 3. The computerized system of claim 1 further comprising an Invitation Manager to issue buying invitations to prospective buyers and accept buying invitations from prospective buyers.

50 35 4. The computerized system of claim 3 further comprising an Invitation Submission/Acceptance Form to obtain information for the Invitation Manager.

55 40 5. The computerized system of claim 2 further comprising a Bid Submission Form for obtaining bid information from a third buyer and a Bid Process Manager for storing the third buyer bid information in a Bid Database.

60 45 6. The computerized system of claim 5, wherein the Bid Process Manager allows new bids, increased bids, decreased bids and withdrawn bids for the product between a Start Time and a Close Time.

5 7. The computerized system of claim 6, wherein the Bid Process
Manager prevents decreased bids and withdrawn bids after a Hold Time
occurring between the Start Time and the Close Time.

10 8. The computerized system of claim 1, wherein the Vendor Process
5 Manager compares sale information from the first vendor and sale information
from a second vendor and stores desired sale information in the Sale Database.

15 9. The computerized system of claim 1, wherein the vendor and the
buyer submit information to and receive information from the system by way of
a wide area network.

20 10. The computerized system of claim 9, wherein the wide area
network comprises the internet.

25 11. The computerized system of claim 2, further comprising a
Merchandise Description Database to store product information, a Vendor
Database to store vendor information obtained from the Merchandise

30 15. Submission Form, a Bid Submission Form for obtaining bid information from a
third buyer, a Bid Process Manager for storing the third buyer bid information in
a Bid Database, and an Invitation Manager to issue buying invitations to
prospective buyers and accept buying invitations from prospective buyers.

35 12. A computerized system for aggregating purchasing power
20 comprising:
a) Buyer Process means for obtaining product information about
a desired product from a buyer;

40 b) Vendor Process means for obtaining sale information from a
first vendor about the product; and

45 c) a Sale means for matching product information and sale
information and generating orders for the product.

50 13. The computerized system of claim 12, further comprising a Group
means for obtaining group bid information from a second buyer about the
product.

5 14. The computerized system of claim 12, wherein the Sale means
compares sale information from the first vendor to sale information from a
second vendor.

10 15. The computerized system of claim 13, further comprising a Bid
5 Process means for obtaining bid information about the product from a third
buyer.

15 16. The computerized system of claim 12, further comprising an
Invitation means for issuing invitations to a second buyer and accepting
invitations from the second buyer.

20 17. The computerized system of claim 13, further comprising a Bid
Process means for obtaining bid information about the product from a third
buyer, and an Invitation means for issuing invitations to a potential buyer and
accepting invitations from the potential buyer.

25 18. The computerized system of claim 15, wherein the first buyer
15 submits information to and receives information from the internet.

30 19. A computer-implemented method for aggregating purchasing
power comprising the steps of:
 a) obtaining product information about a desired product from a
 buyer;
 b) obtaining sale information from a first vendor about the
 product; and
 c) matching product information and sale information and
 generating orders for the product.

35 20. The method of claim 19, further comprising the step of obtaining
40 group bid information from a second buyer about the product.

45 21. The method of claim 19, further comprising the steps of obtaining
sale information from a second vendor and comparing the sale information from
the first vendor and the sale information from the second vendor.

50 22. The method of claim 20, further comprising the step of obtaining
30 bid information about the product from a third buyer.

5 23. The method of claim 19, further comprising the steps of issuing
invitations to a second buyer and accepting invitations from the second buyer.

10 24. The method of claim 20, further comprising the steps of obtaining
bid information about the product from a third buyer, issuing invitations to a
5 potential buyer and accepting invitations from the potential buyer.

15 25. A computer-readable medium containing instructions for controlling
a computer to aggregate purchasing power by:

10 a) obtaining product information about a desired product from a
buyer;

20 b) obtaining sale information from a first vendor about the
product; and

25 c) storing and organizing the product information;

15 d) storing and organizing the sale information;

20 e) matching product information and sale information; and

25 f) generating orders for the product.

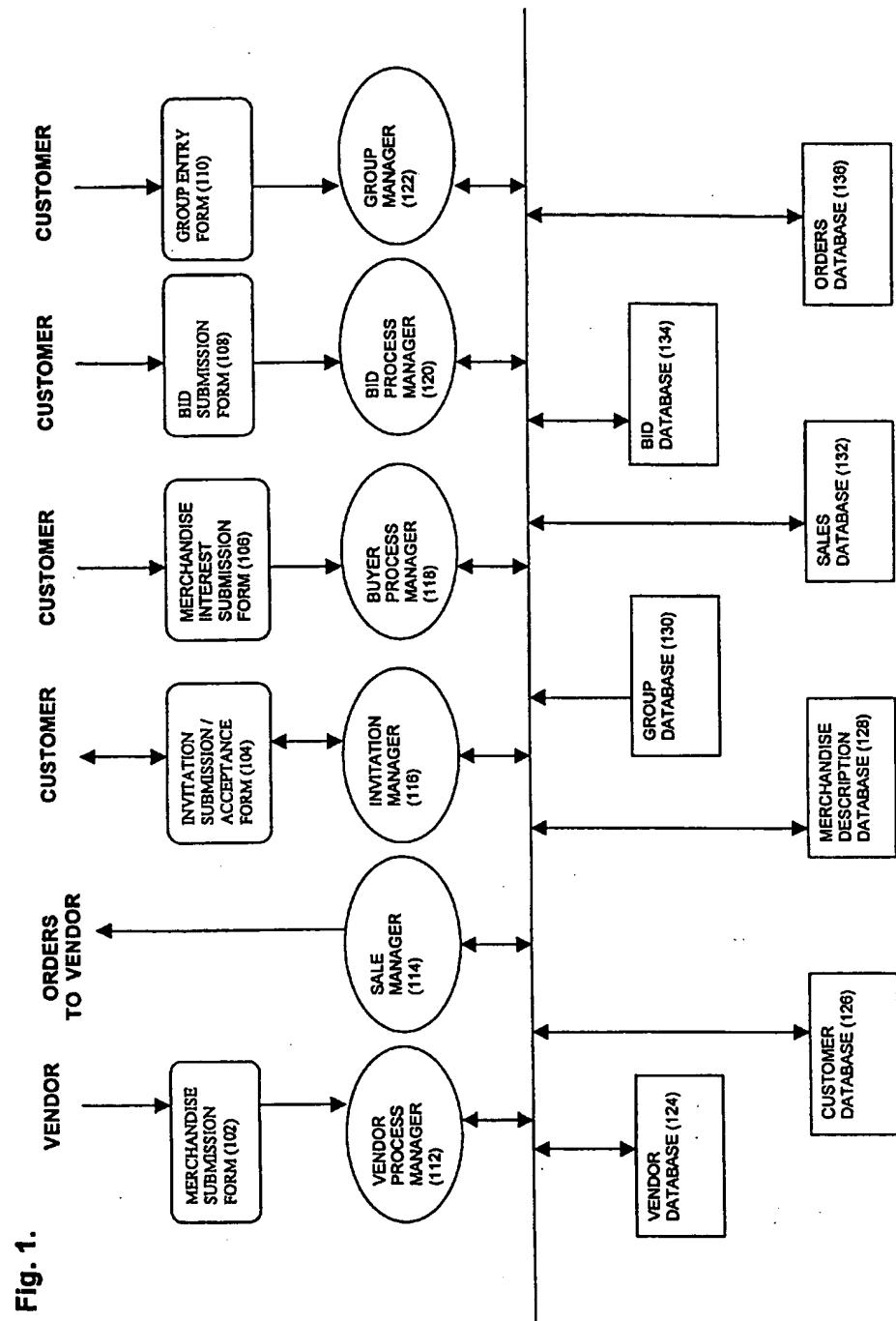
30 26. The computer-readable medium of claim 25, further comprising
instructions for obtaining group bid information from a second buyer about the
product.

35 27. The computer-readable medium of claim 25, further comprising
instructions for obtaining sale information from a second vendor and comparing
the sale information from the first vendor and the sale information from the
second vendor.

40 28. The computer-readable medium of claim 26, further comprising
instructions for obtaining bid information about the product from a third buyer.

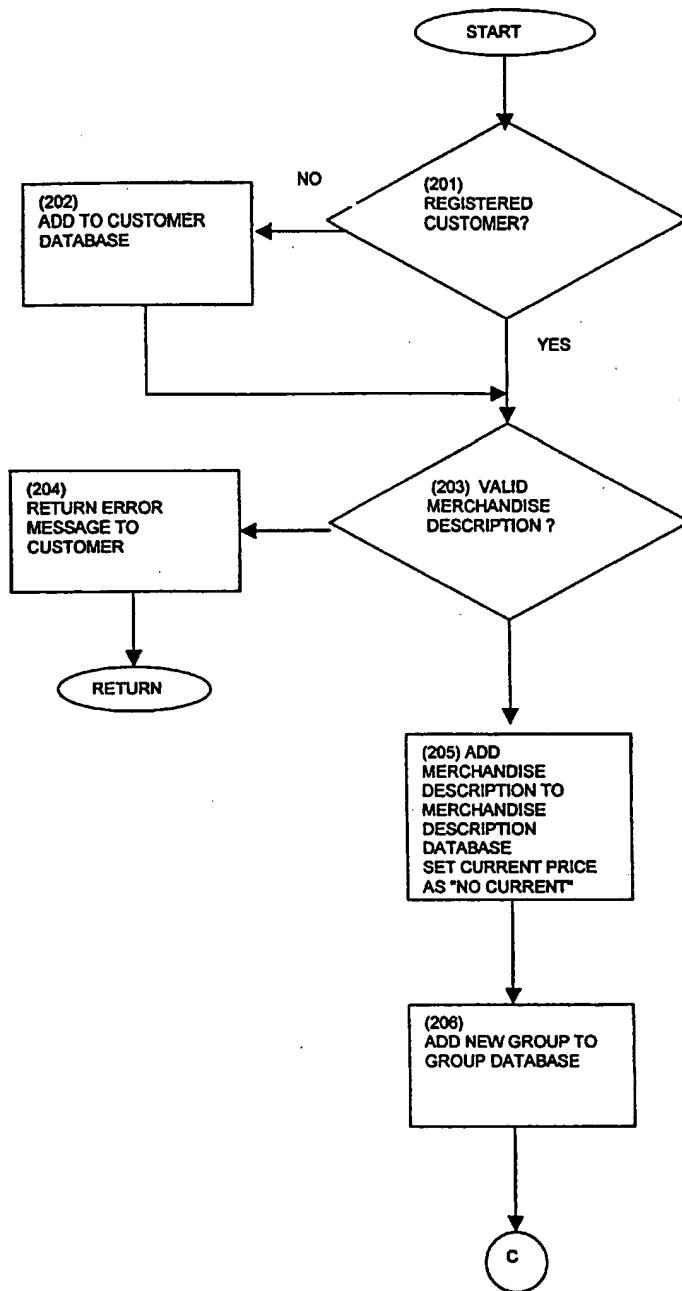
45 29. The computer-readable medium of claim 25, further comprising
instructions for issuing invitations to a second buyer and accepting invitations
from the second buyer.

50 30. The computer-readable medium of claim 26, further comprising
instructions for obtaining bid information about the product from a third buyer,
issuing invitations to a potential buyer and accepting invitations from the
potential buyer.



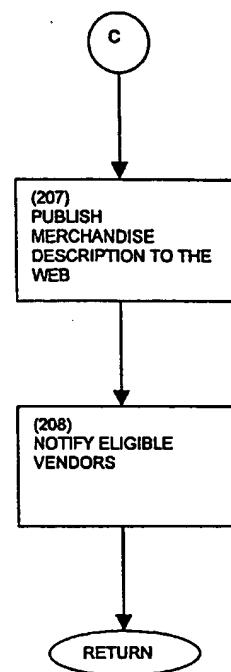
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Fig. 2A.



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Fig. 2B.



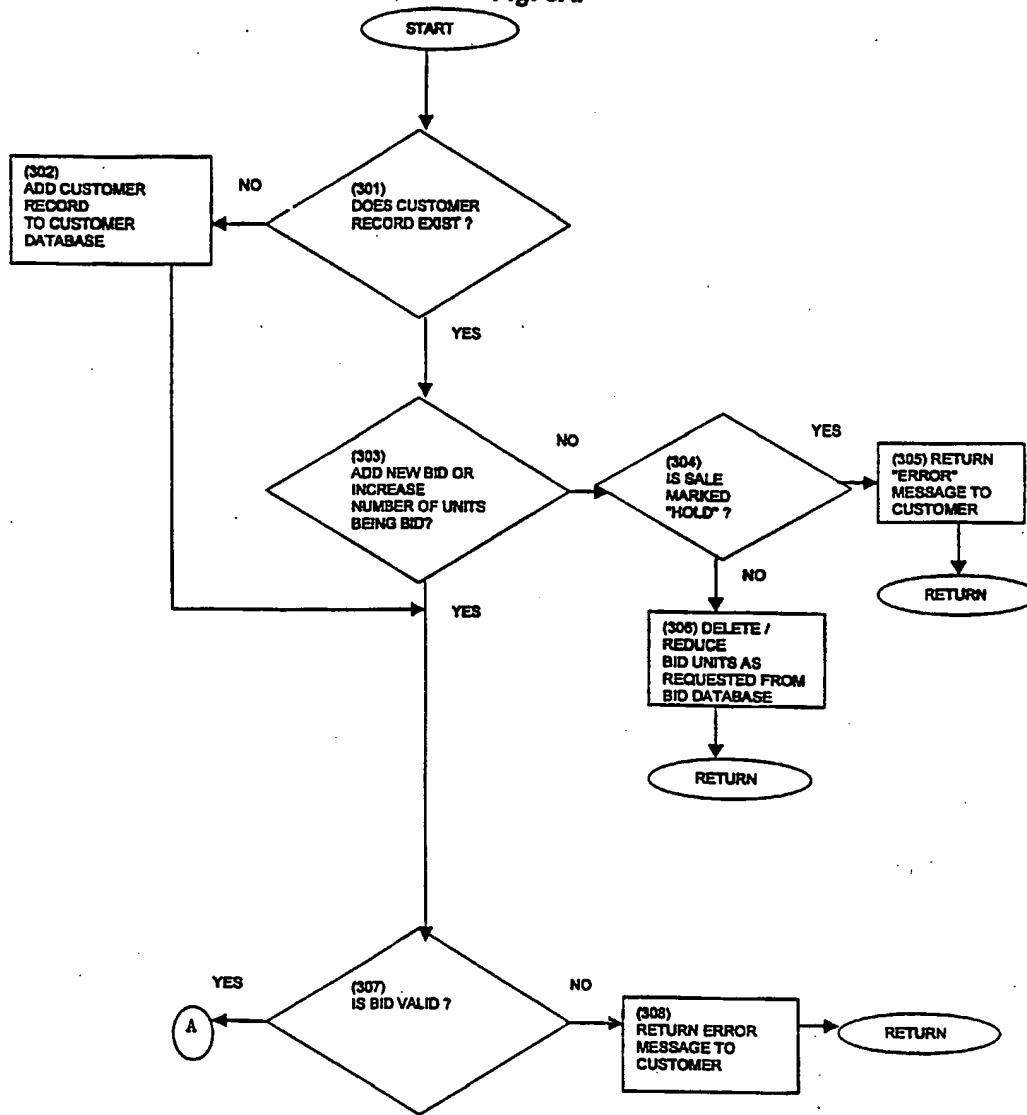
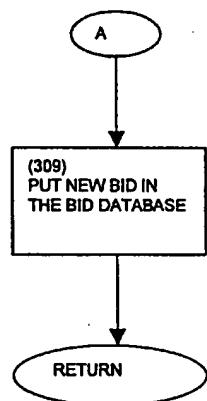
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Fig. 3A.

Fig. 3B.

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Fig. 4A.

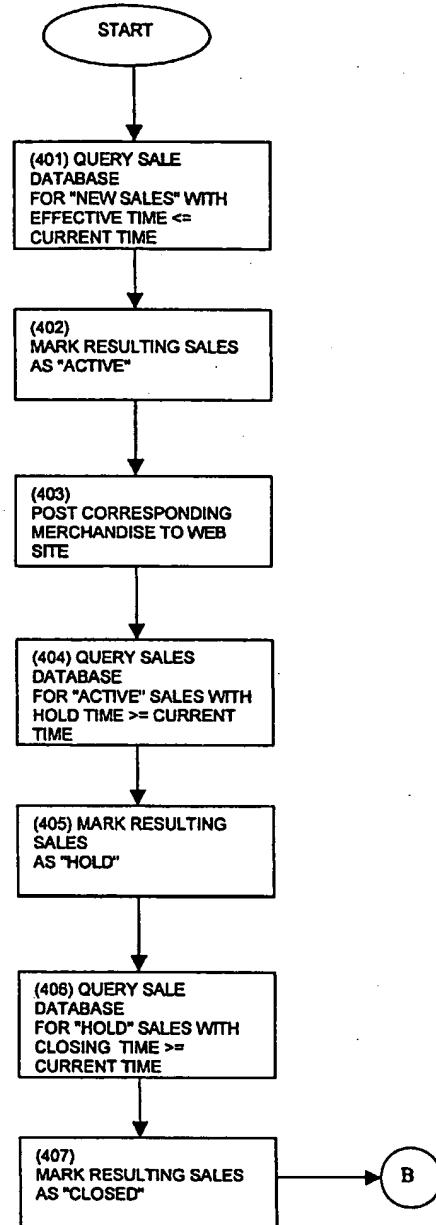
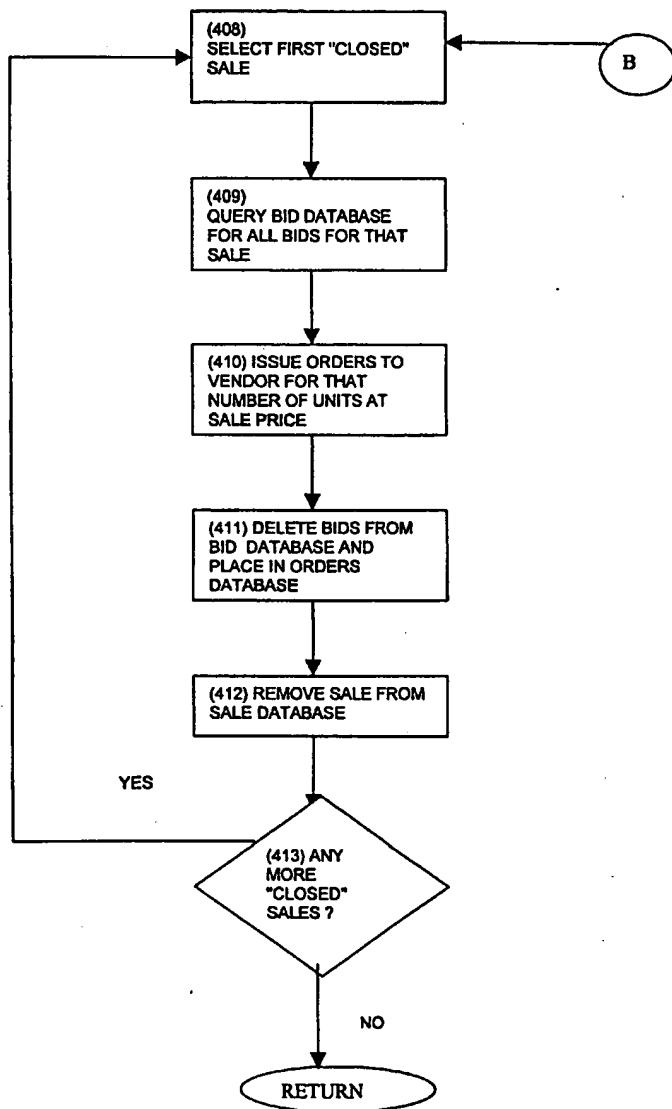
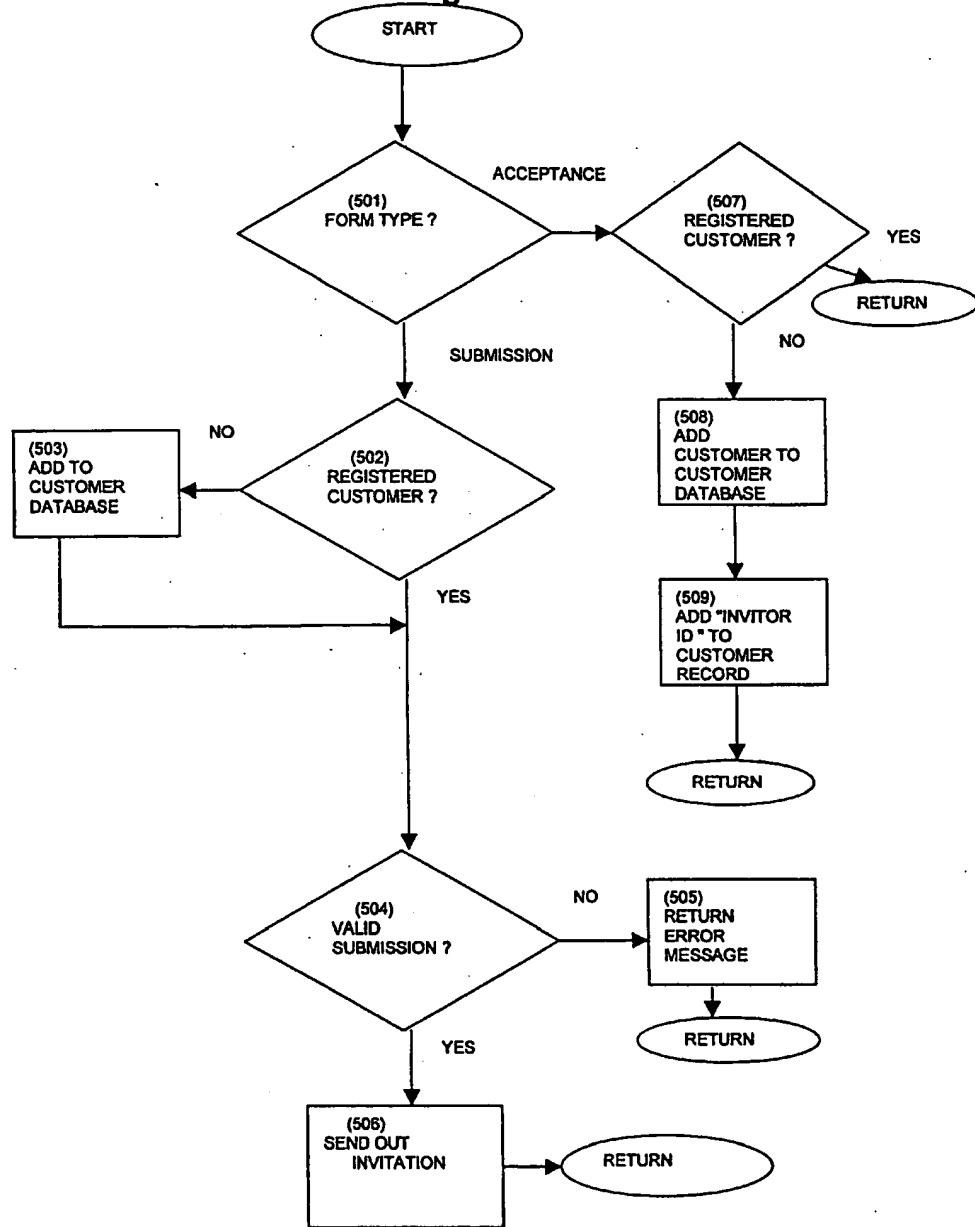


Fig. 4B.



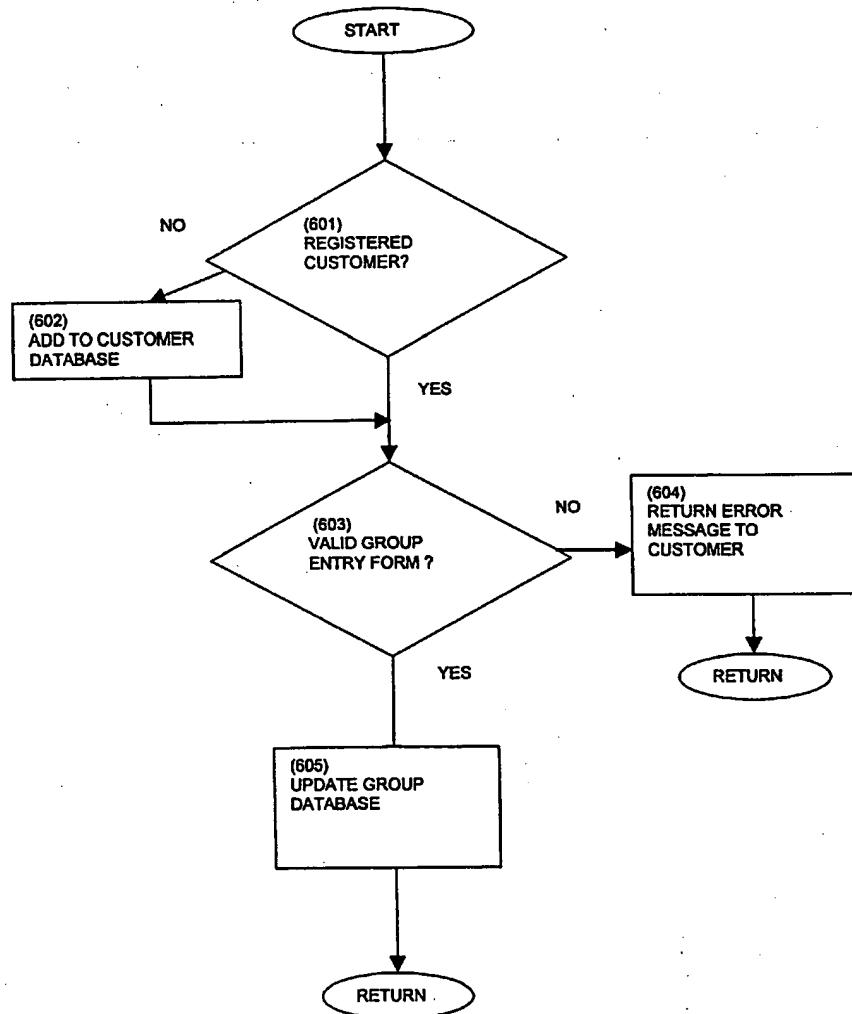
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Fig. 5



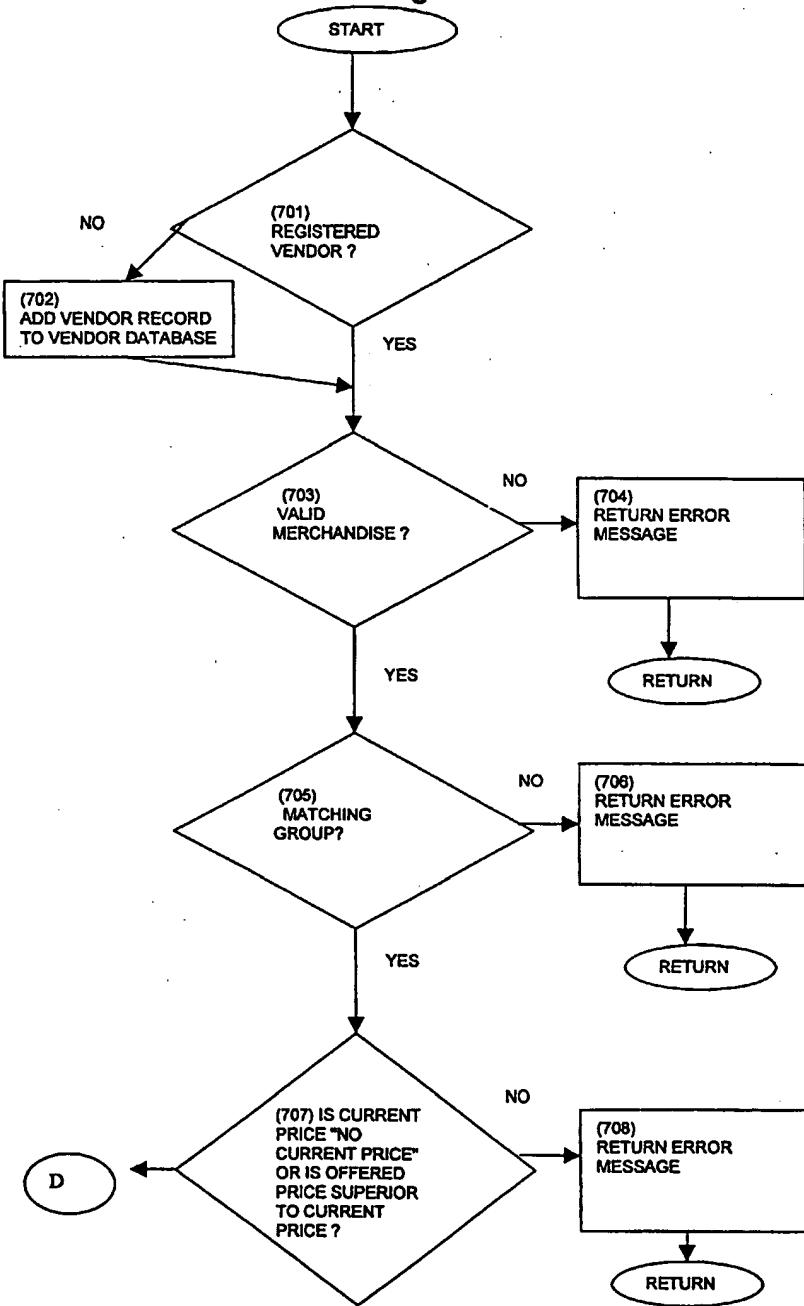
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Fig. 6.



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Fig. 7A.



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Fig. 7B.

